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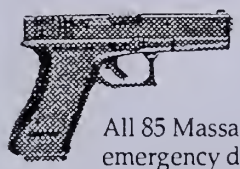
Massachusetts WRISS

Weapon-Related Injury Surveillance System

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health's WRISS project has assembled a number of datasets to track weapon injuries in the state. WRISS is available to assist local violence prevention efforts by supplying local data. If your organization would like to request data (or to join the mailing list), please write to: WRISS, MA Dept. of Public Health, 250 Washington Street, 6th flr., Boston MA 02108 or call (617) 624-5600.

Statewide Reporting by Emergency Departments



All 85 Massachusetts acute care hospital emergency departments report gunshot wounds and violence-related sharp instrument wounds to the state health department. Hospitals report 70-80% of their cases, according to record reviews conducted by WRISS staff. The system has been in place statewide for two years. Newsletters, publications, and data sheets analyzing results are available. WRISS staff are available to assist violence prevention groups in analyzing data relevant to their needs. Currently WRISS is linking ED reports to inpatient and death certificate data. Hospital reporting on victim's age, sex, and race has been reliable. Reporting on surrounding circumstances has much unknown information, and WRISS staff have been comparing results to police NIBRS data, newsclips, and patient interviews to explore the context of weapon injuries in greater detail.

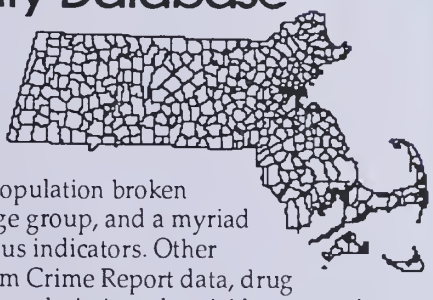
Ballistics Data

Two police crime labs (the Boston Police and the State Police) conduct all investigations of ballistics evidence for the state. Logs maintained by the two ballistics units were merged by WRISS into one common dataset covering the past ten years. Only cases most likely to involve injuries or fatalities were included. The dataset clearly demonstrates the increase in the use of semi-automatic pistols and the decline of revolvers over the ten year period, as well as the increase in medium and large caliber weapons.

Behavioral Risk Factor Survey

The Behavioral Risk Factor Survey is a random digit dial telephone survey of about 2,500 Massachusetts residents. The 1995 survey included a gun ownership module. Preliminary results indicate that 15% of Massachusetts residents have a gun at home. 75% of gunowners said they did not acquire their weapon for protection.

Community Database



For every city and town in the state, the Community Database includes weapon injury victims, US Census population broken down by sex/race/age group, and a myriad of socioeconomic status indicators. Other tables include Uniform Crime Report data, drug arrests, drug treatment admissions, homicides, type of community, and health status indicators. The database enables WRISS to analyze factors that are correlated with local weapon injury rates. For example, currently we are trying to gain a better understanding of how large cities which have very high weapon injury rates differ from those with low rates. The database also assists the project in filling data requests. Because of its specifity, WRISS can fill data requests as narrow as, "What is the gunshot wound rate for white males ages 15-24 in towns of under 25,000 population in the western part of the state?"

Gun Accident Survey

WRISS is currently mailing surveys to patients who were wounded in gun accidents. Patients are identified by the emergency department reports. The follow-up surveys gain more information on the circumstances of the incident, intoxication of patient and/or shooter, extent of medical services used, payor, probability of longterm disability, and other information. Data will be collected through 1996.

ED Log Software

WRISS developed a software program in 1991 to computerize the emergency department log. Three EDs currently use "ED LOGBOOK." Information is captured on all patient visits; for injury visits, the cause, intent, diagnosis, and job-relatedness are captured. Victim/offender relationship is recorded in assault cases. The program provides population-based injury surveillance in one region of the state.

Funding provided in part by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention